

# 'Our night WITH ZARA'



'Charming and lovely' is how Chris Quin saw the royal



Radiant Zara wowed MC Joe Cotton and guests

For someone who had just stepped off a 24-hour flight following one of the most stressful weeks of her life, Zara Phillips looked amazing.

When she turned up as the surprise guest of honour at an Auckland fundraising event, whispers went around the crowd, and most said "wow". Zara (30) is much more beautiful in person than she appears in photos. She has the athletic physique and figure you'd expect from a professional sportswoman,

but up close she's much more slight and finely boned. She'd prepared for the event quickly after arriving, yet her hair, dress and makeup were immaculate. And there was no sign of the supposedly hurt and humiliated wife tabloids had imagined in the past week – she was composed, fun and ready to chat.

Her six-week marriage to rugby player Mike Tindall had been under the microscope since he was seen getting up close and personal with a woman in a Queenstown bar.

Weekly writer Emma Rawson was with Zara Phillips at an Auckland charity event

## ZARA'



But Zara's rushed visit to Auckland was as much about the CatWalk Spinal Cord Injury Trust fundraiser as it was about confronting Mike.

Zara's regal breeding showed through as she worked the

**'She had a beautiful warmth about her'**

room, unfazed by all of the attention. She may not have a royal title, but she has the poise and presence of a princess.

"She had a beautiful warmth about her," says Jo Allison, one of the event organisers. "For her to take time out for this event is pretty special."

Another partygoer, who sat with Zara at the event, says, "She was down-to-earth and very appreciative of New Zealand."

Those with Zara as she prepared for the event last Wednesday said she was relaxed, despite rushing to be there. "It was last-minute and

though she had loads of people scurrying about her she was calm. You'd never believe she had just stepped off a plane."

Zara, who is a patron of the CatWalk Trust, gave a brief speech, paying tribute to three staff from IT firm Gen-i – Jo Allison, CEO Chris Quin and Peter Finch – who are running the New York Marathon to raise money for the charity.

"I'm massively proud and in awe of you guys," she said, before laughingly predicting an All Blacks versus England Rugby World Cup final.

Zara later snuck away through

a basement exit close to midnight, giving the media the slip – as she did the next day. There were rumours of a night on Auckland's west coast and lunch in Napier the next day. She then headed to Dunedin to catch up with Mike (32), who fronted up to the media for the first time since his antics were reported. He said he hoped recent events wouldn't affect his game.

Zara may have only been in Auckland a few hours, but she impressed all with her composure and grace.

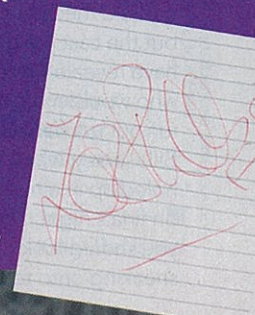
**Emma Rawson. Additional reporting: Kelly Bertrand**

## EILISH'S PROUD ROYAL MOMENT

Zara left a lasting impression on one young girl, who got to spend a few minutes chatting to the royal.

Eilish Quin (11) was at the CatWalk function with her marathon-running dad Chris. Zara signed her autograph for Eilish and her friend Georgia Lewis (also 11), and now has a couple of fans for life.

"She was really nice and easy to talk to," says Eilish. Chris says the fact that Zara singled the girls out for attention is a sign of her graciousness. "She was really interested in meeting people," he says. "She'd arrived that day on a flight from the UK and was rushed into a situation where everyone wanted a piece of her, but she was charming and lovely."



## UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Zara has been a long-time supporter of the CatWalk Spinal Cord Injury Trust, which was set up five years ago by Catriona Williams, a former leading horse-rider from New Zealand who became a tetraplegic after a riding accident in 2002. The organisation raises money to support research into finding a cure for spinal cord injuries. A fashion show and auction – to which Zara donated a signed riding shirt – have helped to build funds for the trust, along with money that will be raised by the marathon runners.



Zara and Chris (top) with Jo, Catriona